

her fears (are made of this) by pally (palliris)

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Summary:

There's something wrong with Max's step-brother, Billy.

her fears (are made of this)

Author's Note:

SRRY IF THIS WASNT WHAT U WERE EXPECTIN, nd its a wee bit short, but still what i imagined it to be

MMKAY i just... cant write a proper outsider pov fic, can i.... the whole entire point of one is to find out their reaction to a big thing, but that so called 'big thing' is only alluded to... in, the, last, fucking, paragraph..... sorry fam

There's something wrong with Max's step-brother, Billy.

She first notices it when he doesn't look at her the whole ride home. It had only been less than three weeks since she sedated him, so Max had just chalked it up to that.

Then, he stops picking her up altogether.

Sure, yeah, he had said the day before that she couldn't count on him to get home anymore- complete with the whole intimidation thing, sans the arm grabbing- but it was still a surprise when one day turned into two, into three, four, and five; then, a whole week. It was confusing; *Billy* was confusing.

Max had never really tried to analyze why Billy was so *Billy*, because she got a good look at it any day her step-father was home. A small, especially quiet part of her is sort of piteous towards him, but she mostly doesn't care.

(And if her hands sometimes shake when she gets near them, not because of what Billy could do to her, but because of what *she* was capable of doing to *him*, he wasn't the wiser.)

Home is still the same as ever, except it's not. Her mom, who had once flourished and bloomed like a beautiful flower, was wilting. Her step-father, who hadn't seemed like the bane of purity to begin with, had slowly grown more frequently aggressive. She kind of hates her

mom for not seeing what he was, but Max will never stop loving her.

Billy, though; he's changed the most. And in the shortest period of time, too. There's a certain touch in his stance that seems less imposing when he grabs a drink out of the fridge, like he's trying less to exude that gross sexual stuff she can usually see coming off of him in waves. Doesn't always wear his leather jacket unzipped when it gets cold, either.

The pants, unfortunately, stay too tight, crossing the threshold of being moderately indecent. Sometimes, from what feels like so long ago, she might've wanted to be as confident as he was. Now, all she can see how scared he is.

It doesn't happen too often- only during the rare span of time where Billy is actually home *and* out of his room- but Billy'll just. Look at her.

At first she had thought it was creepy, and then she had actually seen the look in his eyes.

(She knew what it was; had seen it one too many times in the mirror when she takes a step back and remembers what she's witnessed, what she's *committed*, and it looks like pure fear.)

Max feels powerful. Max feels powerless.

There's not really any in between, but then Billy isn't around as much and she starts feeling less of the latter and more of the former. She has a good time, plays with her friends (her *friends*) at the arcade, and doesn't even feel too awkward around El anymore. There was a small period of stagnation in which there had been a broad chasm between them, but it shortened and shuttered to a close with time. And lots of effort on Max's part.

It's days like this that really make her thankful for the fact that they left no-good Cali, and came here to Indiana. There's a wind in her long hair, rushing smell of forest in her nose, and the feeling of rightness that comes from being completely, wholeheartedly in control. Max's balance on a skateboard is impeccable. Not perfect, but close enough that she feels on top of the world practically gliding

down a short hill.

Lucas is at the top of the hill with Will, the three of them the only ones who could ditch their parents for the sunny Saturday morning. She can feel Lucas' gaze on her, and they sorta feel glued to her back like magnets. Makes her feel wanted.

There's a sort of expectation that comes with that, and she thrives on that thrilling rush. It's like the breeze that makes the end of her russet locks bumble and tangle across her face, thrown there by a force she had created, all by herself.

(Maxine might not've wanted this, not before, but Max is *fucking* fine, thank you very much.)

She's just coming down the end of the hill, sidewalk tapering off into grass and road, when a car passes her by real damn close. An expletive is right on the edge of her voice when Max actually looks up, and barely catches a glimpse of her brother's face in the passenger seat.

She really, really doesn't care what he's doing with his free time. But, like the idiot she is in the art of giving a shit, she still glances and looks and takes in and memorizes, and then she *knows* that car, because it sure as hell isn't the one he usually drives. If she ever sees it again, she'll know exactly who he was driving with.

Max is *not* interested in what Billy's been doing that's making him so different. For her mom and step-father, Max has a good idea of what made them snap into the personas they wear today.

But with Billy, it seems less like he's becoming someone new, and more like he's finally becoming who he was supposed to be. Tragic, whatever. He'll be moving on soon, so. Not Max's problem.

(Except it honestly is, because she hears him curse in his room one night on her way for a midnight-snack, and the only reason why she can tell he's crying is because the door is cracked a bit. She supposes Billy has mastered the art of silent tears; something she's still working on. More time equals more payoff, and all that nonsense.)

It turns the corner, and she still can't make out who he was in the car with. Just the fact that Billy's watching her- probably has been since they drove past- and she feels the hair on the back of her neck stand up at his electrifying gaze. It's piercing and cold, unlike the warmth of Lucas' magnet-gaze. Max hates it.

"Hey, Max! You good?" Lucas calls from behind her, and she turns around. She imagines her face must look intense, because the ever-frightened Will gives a moment of pause before approaching her, but it's fine.

"We had to run," Will starts, but there's also a smile on his face like he's surprised he can still do it. "But we made it."

"And I beat you," Lucas says, raising his fist. Will just shakes his head, hiding a laugh behind his hand.

And from there it all devolves into babbling and squabbling, the kind she'd expect from three kids. There's an undercurrent in the air that she can't quite place or get rid of, but Max doesn't really care.

She doesn't think about a lot of things, and in this moment, with Lucas shining with sweat under the sun and Will relaxed and having fun, she can't even feel bad about not thinking about Billy.

(She *does* think of him, though, later; much, much later, deep and well into the night when she isn't expected to be home. Max peers through that crack in the door, and sees something she shouldn't. Scampers off to her own bedroom like she's done something wrong and slams it shut. Makes sure not to make a peep the rest of the night. Billy doesn't show his face the next day, and she's almost glad for it.)